

Muri del pianto e cattedrali del consumo

Weeping Walls and Shopping Malls

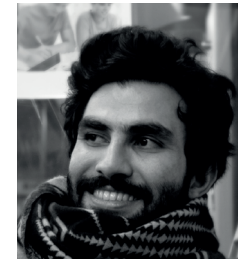
Immaginate che per costruire una città sia sempre necessario uccidere. Se il lutto serve a qualcosa, ci sarà chi commisererà le vittime, celebra le ricorrenze e fa i conti con gli assassini. Ogni città esiste in un luogo che è già stato violentato. Costruiamo a dismisura le città contemporanee e rimuoviamo tutto quello che dovrà ancora essere irrimediabilmente perduto a causa del nostro desiderio e della nostra necessità di costruire. Gli architetti responsabili vorrebbero esprimere un sincero senso di cordoglio per queste perdite. Potremmo chiamarlo “lutto radicale” per una perdita irrinunciabile. Indugiano diligenti davanti a un muro del pianto mentre sono attratti dalle cattedrali del consumo. Le vittime sacrificali sono fantasmagorie. Si ripresenta il “meccanismo vittimario”. I martiri del progetto escludono sempre qualcosa che non vogliono conoscere. Sacrificherebbero ancora la cosa più preziosa che abbiamo per la gloria della città?

Imagine that, in order to build a city, murders were always necessary. If grief counts then someone has the task to mourn for the victim, to plan the celebration of the recurrence and to come to term with the murderer. The territory where the city exists is certainly that which has been violated at first. When we stare at the ongoing overbuilding of our contemporary cities we are often reminded of all that which has been and must be irreparably lost because of the desire and the necessity to build. Responsible architects want to express a profound and sincere sense of grief for that loss. We could name it: “radical grief”. The well-educated architects indulge diligently in front of their weeping walls before “driving” irresistibly toward their shopping malls. The overexposed sacrificial victim appears as that which has been irreparably lost and cannot be revived: a recurring martyrdom (victimage mechanism). Are we still asked to sacrifice the most precious thing for the glory of our city, and, if so, what is it and who has the task to mourn it?



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Claudio Sgarbi with a text and drawings by Ali Navidbakhsh and contributions by Grazia Biondi, Roger Connah, Donald Kunze and Jesse Rafeiro

Imagine that, in order to build a city, murders were always necessary.

There are *victims*, heroes, martyrs, scapegoats and many others voluntary and involuntary deaths (agonies or terminal-illness) – even the unborn victims of violence have been codified by law. As for the *murderers* we should appeal to a meticulous analysis of the general category of culpable homicide: serial killing, first degree murder, second degree murder, voluntary and involuntary manslaughter, justifiable homicide, felony, infanticide; all of which have differing degrees of causation, (pre)meditation and intentionality. As for the *accomplices*, the conspirators, the different kinds of witnesses, the indifferent absentminded observers, the passive contemplators ... how can we possibly identify these? (The role of victim, murderer and accomplice can easily be exchanged).

If we consider as victims of building, also animals, literal scapegoats and all the involuntary killing of animated beings, vegetal life, microorganisms and “unanimated” matter, then the list would become vertiginous.

There are Perfect (un-culpable) Murderers, so there must also be perfect victims and perfect survivors. No trace must be left, all guilt avoided. The state of being a perfect surviving victim is ideal for those who want to practice innocence. The art of building is the art of switching into being a perfect murderer, victim and survivor according to what the situation demands.

If grief counts for anything, then someone has to mourn for the victims and to plan the celebrations, to come to terms with the murderers and to deal with the accomplices. How to ignore all this seems to be our main preoccupation. This is the Architecture of Oblivion and Forgetting.

Forgiveness has an ambiguous existence: it comes and goes, and it never turns out to be fair. Is there a “genuine forgiveness” that does not involve “the forgetting” of the events? This would be a different way of signifying the “debt to the dead”. Without forgetting, memory would be paralyzed – a future with a paralyzed memory (different dissimulations of hysteria?).

So we have to ask forgiveness from the victims. Not in the sense that once we have been forgiven, we can forget about them! No, we have constantly to remember that we have been forgiven and will be forgiven again.

We have to make sure that the pattern will recur every time we want it to recur – “...now I feel a bit guilty so I will be forgiven, then I will be forgiven too much and I should feel guilty...”. Once the memory (mourning) is reenacted periodically, forgiveness will be granted. We simply have to make sure that this *on and off* has a rhythm. This is valid for us, the survivors, those who have to come to terms with the victims that were sacrificed in order to make the space of the city available to us. And the resentment of the murderers? Is it sincere? Well, we might say, that’s their problem. Not exactly, however, because the victims ask for justice if not for revenge. The vendetta of the victims of building is chasing us.

“Building is the tomb of architecture”. If so, “who” is

buried there?

The corpse of architecture is its void.

“MORTACCI TUA!” Very popular Italian slang from the Roman folklore to vilify all the dead ancestors of the person to whom it is addressed.

“Acquaintance with grief turns out to be one of the more unusual prerequisites of architectural appreciation”

Alain De Botton, *The Architecture of Happiness.*

The territory where the city and any building exist is certainly that which has first been violated.

When we stare at the persistent overbuilding of our contemporary cities we are often reminded of all that once was, and must again be, irreparably lost because of this desire and necessity to build.

There is grief not only for the city (the ideal city that has been dissimulated by the real one) but in the city. Grief for building and in the act of building. Grief for all the destruction and violence that the act of building implies.

The city is an overarching manifestation of building. An excessive manifestation. Too much and yet not enough.

There are many contemporary paradigmatic cases of architectural murders, dead or dying cities and condemned buildings.

Think of a vertiginous paradoxical list...like: The Dead City of Linfen, The Ghost City of Ordos, All the Empty Apartments of Vancouver, Dubai, Hong Kong, Rome...give to each place as a suspension point; All the Empty Offices Which Rent Empty Apartments (the documents, the folders, the storages where

emptiness is registered), All the Vacancies (places that vacate like phantoms in no-places), Decommissioned Plants and Factories, Temporary Abandoned Apartments, Places Inside Apartments that Remains Empty for an Un-measurable Lapse of Time, Empty Train Stations at Night, Un-built Stuff, Un-born Buildings, Un-wanted Spaces, Abandoned Rooms, Uninhabitable Interstices, Ruins in All Their Forms, Weekend Houses at Working Seasons, Abandoned Post-Massacre Places...what is the most abandoned place you can think of?...How long does it take to make a space condemned to oblivion? Which places give you the most profound sense of discomfort and sense of abandonment? For example: SAMCOR Abattoirs, Slaughterhouse and other state projects by Francisco Salamone in Argentina, Hamilton Steel Mills, Montreal Silos, Chernobyl, Pripjat Amusement Park, Abandoned Wonderland in Chenzhuang, Packard Plant Detroit, Wheeling-Pit Steel Mill in Ohio...the infinity of the list, the exhausting power of a taxonomy of places embalmed in their suspension, a definitive fulfillment of the listing of all the possible empty empty spaces...like the opposite, the antinomy, the oxymoron of "An Attempt to Exhaust a Parisian Place": an exhaustive attempt to erase a Parisian place by means of absences. Erasing the erasures. I think now of a place like the stain of blood on the Bluebeard Key: the more you try to erase it the more it becomes manifest.

(fig. 1, 2, 3, 4) Building for the sake of building is so overarching and ubiquitous now, that it is no longer comprehensible. It is outnumbering our comprehension. And by outnumbering it, it also relieves us from the necessity of mourning. What does

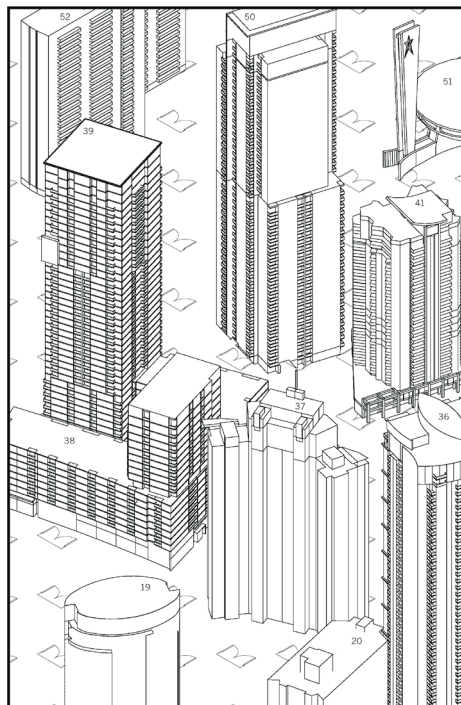


fig. 1 Abandoned in-to Scale – Condemned to be Forgotten. Details. Quadrant 1

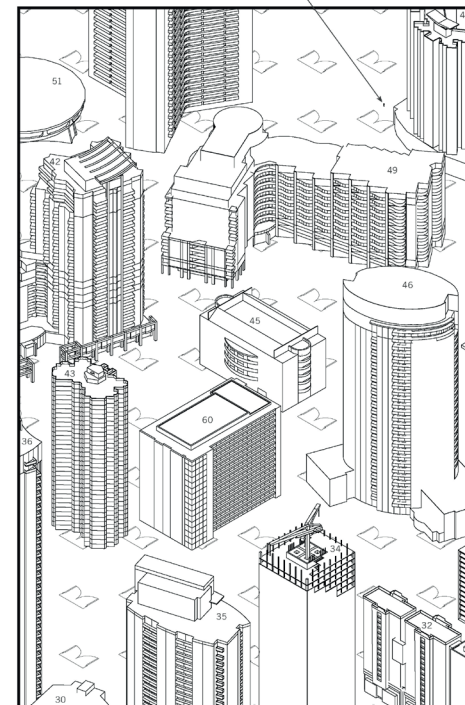


fig. 2 Abandoned in-to Scale – Condemned to be Forgotten. Details. Quadrant 2

it mean if four and a half trillions of square meters of abandoned buildings exists in the world now? It means nothing because it is too much. It is too much and yet not enough. But enough to lose any sense. An infinitely exceeding quantifiable extension, has perverted and distorted the territory for the manifestation of building. The quantitative shift has subverted the panorama, has reverted the perspective where building make sense: now, yes, we can stare at the evoked outrageously unlimited labyrinth that has no 'outside'. Yet this is not enough. The more I build the more I lose the sense of building. Indeed what is the sense of building if no one knows how to dwell or inhabit all that which gets built? The answer is in the question: the outnumbering infinite quantitative increment (artificially supported by statistical intangible logics) is functional to making you lose sight of the sense. It perfectly fits this purpose. Time will never be enough to inhabit all these spaces. Time is their debris. I lose the sense of building and the reason why there should be one particular place worth inhabiting (dwelling). We want at any cost to make the city become an absolute object, an absolutely prevaricating object so that I must assume its being as such, as it is: an undeniable, un-falsifiable evidence; a truism.

The grief has to cope with the vertigo of the dead, the vertigo of the "debts to the dead". The vertigo of the outnumbering is a stratagem to forget. When the debt becomes so immense to be inestimable then no one has to worry about paying it back and moreover those who have contracted it are totally dispensed from it! Now it's a creditors' problem. "Sorry planet, no way we can stop it! Now it's your problem!". The meta-

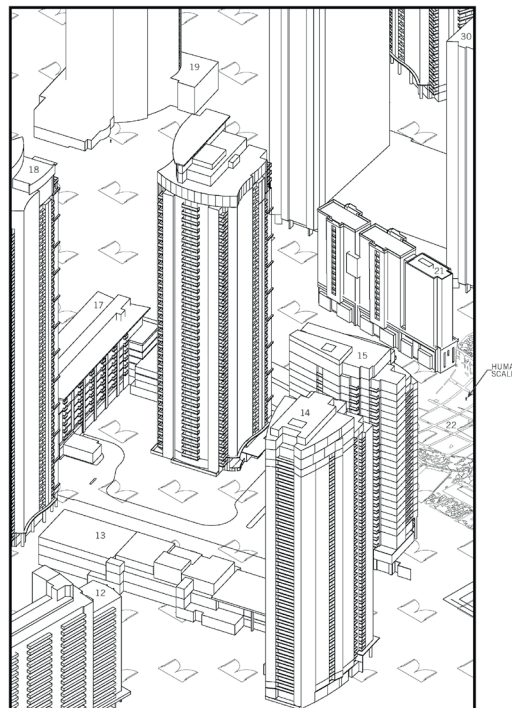


fig. 3 Abandoned in-to Scale – Condemned to be Forgotten. Details. Quadrant 3

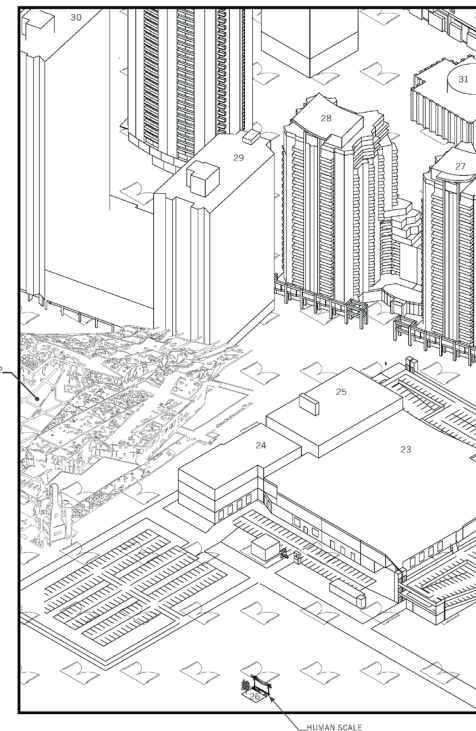


fig. 4 Abandoned in-to Scale – Condemned to be Forgotten. Details. Quadrant 4 (Drawings by Ali Navidbakhsh, 2017)

architect can eventually hospitalize it all.

Since that which is lost, destroyed, violated and killed is now outweighing the imagination, this immenseness means I cannot feel any appropriate compassion for its lack of scale. Grief is transmogrified into the celebrative commemoration for this inevitable loss. A big commemorative party.

Indeed, this surreal condition where no one dies creates the desire for death at any cost. But the surrealistic condition where everything dies also creates a desire for life at any cost. Life now, as much as we can live it! There will inevitably be an apocalypse but the problem is not what we are doing after it, but while we wait for it.

There is now a vast army of responsible architects who express a profound and, we must assume, sincere sense of grief for the loss that building implies. We could name it “radical grief”. There are moments of responsible consciousness; denunciation, remediation and mourning, atonement through revitalization, decontamination, and other forms of exorcism. Architects are full of surprises. Those who have created the problems can now fix them.

When we title all the spoiling that we are witnessing as “beautiful destruction” we anaesthetize the evidence with a sort of mournful pride.

Look at all that we could do! We could really destroy it all now if we wanted to! Why not then try to destroy it and see how we can manage the destruction? Many fiction stories are centered on this. A global destruction and the cunning Daedalic intelligence of who will work out a new survival.

The well-educated architects indulge diligently in front of their weeping walls before “driving” irresistibly

toward their shopping malls. (fig. 5)

The overexposed sacrificial victim appears as that which has been irreparably lost and cannot be revived. Collateral effects have always been out of control. They can be glorious weapons of mass distraction. (fig. 6)

Necropolis: Memorial for the Ducks who Died for a Beautiful Destruction.

The Necropolis is the story of conflicting natural and artificial landscapes, a counter-factual proposal for the dynamic and fluxing fabric of the Oil Sand industry in Alberta, Canada. It is a speculative and theoretical proposal that explores our precipitous abuse of the landscape, and the sincere grief in the form of cheeky satire for the loss of scarce resources. The proposal is an *imaginarium* for Alberta’s landscape and oil economy where fictional narrative is used to explore, discover and invent unique realities with new ecologies of hope. It is a speculative perspective that explores the disappearing recent past, and a bewildering state of grief. Necropolis intends to tell the story of land when the land had more meaning, more history and readings than it has now. It represents an attempt to heal the colossal land scars caused by Oil production, by bewildering infrastructural solutions and ecological fantasies of a very real kind. This theoretical architectural fantasy dwells on fragments and clichés; the drawn world is not so much a drowned world as one marked by multiple displacements and lost personal histories. Necropolis creates a new prehensile reality for the future legacy of martyrdom, and the sacrifices that were never regarded. This phantasmagoria (Necropolis) is a provocative narrative response to that which we have

A Vertiginous Deteriorating List (in disorder of appearance):

Sustainable Designers for the Future (SDF), Symbiosis Heroes for the Anthropocene (SHA), Need Leed Planet Earth (NLPE), Building Green Innocence Companions (BGIC), Omni-comprehensive Sustainability of All (OcoSA), Biomimicry Warriors for Architecture Camouflage (BWAC), Green Activists for Gray Concrete-ness (GAGC), Innocent Green Builders Holy Architects Inc. (IGB), Green Guerrillas Apostles (GGA), Eco Friendly Asbestos Companions (EFAC), Save Earth / Do Nothing (SE/DN), LEED Monks (LEEDM), Global Warming Cooling Building Demonstrators (GWCBDD), Garbage Islands Dwellers for the Future of Humanity (GIDFH), Green Globe Practitioners (GGP), Build Green Protocollers (BGP), Build Gaia Future Manifesting (BGF), Star System Exterminators (SSE), Save the Planet / Kill an Architect Movement (SPKAM), Survivalist Zombies for the Peace of Architecture (SZPA), Total Peace Total Beauty Builders for Tomorrow (TPTBBT), Yoga Builders for the Peace of the Senses (YBPS), Global Health Movements for Pure Building (GHMPB), Mortar Alive Forever (MAF), Plastering the Future with Love (PFL), Mother Earth Companions (MEC), Cool Global Warming Hyperspace-Building (CGWHB), Green Buddha Stone Risers (GBSR), The Planet Defender (PD), Walls Of Peace Builders (WOPB), Scavengers for the Building of Humanity (SBH), Reclaiming Waste Heroes of the Up-cycling of the Forgotten Debris (HUF), Consumer Leftover Recyclers (CLR), No-Name Architects & No Wage Martyrs for the Humanity of Good Building (NNANWMHGB), Ethical Builders Against All (EBAA), We Want It Clean Architecture Movement (WWICAM), Gluten Free Environments Risers (GFER), Vegan Architecture Ensemble (VAE), Second Hand Architecture for Responsibility (SHAR), Garbage Survivors Eden (GSE), Paradise Without Buildings (PWB), Martyrs of Green Forever Vegan Construction Inc. (MGFVCI), Hey Hey I Have Saved the World Today Architecture Inc (HHISWTAI), Low Calories Building Raising (LCBR), Carbon Fossil Killers Construction Inc. (CFKCI), Jesus Loves Green Builders (JLGB), Google Know Everything Sustainable (GKES), Emissions Free Total Building (EFTB), Carbon Neutral Angels of Angles (CNA), Net Zero Energy Building for the Spirit (NZBS), Green Off-gassing Suppressors Association (GOGSA), Sustainable Algorithms for Un-building the Future (SAUbf), Parametric Parasites for Healing Spaces (PPHS), Organic Architects (OA), Pesticides Suckers Material Fabrication (PSMF), Anti Electric Radiation Walls Heroes (AERWH), Feng Shui Façade Ventilators (FGFV), Gluten-free Building Material Consultants (GBMC), Rigid Design Institute for Flexibility (RDI), Resilient Affordable Housing for the Responsible 1% who Donate for the Environment (AHRIDE), Low Profile Meta Architecture (LPMA), Solar Power Yoga Mat Flooring (SPYMF) Global Warm Build Cool (GWBC), Net Zero Global Warming Awareness (NZGWA), Non GMO By-product Building Matter (NgmoBBM), Ego-Systems Busters for the Joy of Overbuilding (ESBJO), Façade Therapy Fundamentalists (FTF), Spills Absorbers Footprints Annihilators (SAFA)...(To be completed)

lost; and ode to 1600 naïve little ducks that sacrificed their lives. It denounces belonging. Even for the ducks, grief has to be re-imagined along with new flight paths for martyrdoms. Necropolis is a dark, wet territory made up of a complex accumulation and compression of various types of carcasses. Body parts collide in an entropically generated landscape, creating a territory that can be ravished from multiple points of view. Abandoned skeletons built up over years resemble the prehistoric leftovers of an ignorant civilization. Yet this new territory is the most visited in Alberta, due to the lavish art of taxidermy. Necropolis can be best described as a mass burial territory exhibited in vitrines. A. N.

There is another recurring act of martyrdom (victimage mechanism) in the doubling and the splitting of the identities of the designers of cities who are always required to leave something out (*precluded/forecluded*) from their matter of concern and from their mirror image.

The city designer is not responsible for the consequences of the design because the responsibilities are only limited to the efficiency of the action. The consequences must be left out from any other matter of concern. No one must question the reason for so many victims, murders and complicity. This is not our job.

Are we still asked to sacrifice the most precious thing for the glory of our city and, if so, what is it and who has the task to mourn it?

Marcus Curtius is a mythological young Roman who jumped on his horse, fully armed, into an infernal ditch to save the whole city of Rome from being sucked into that hole.

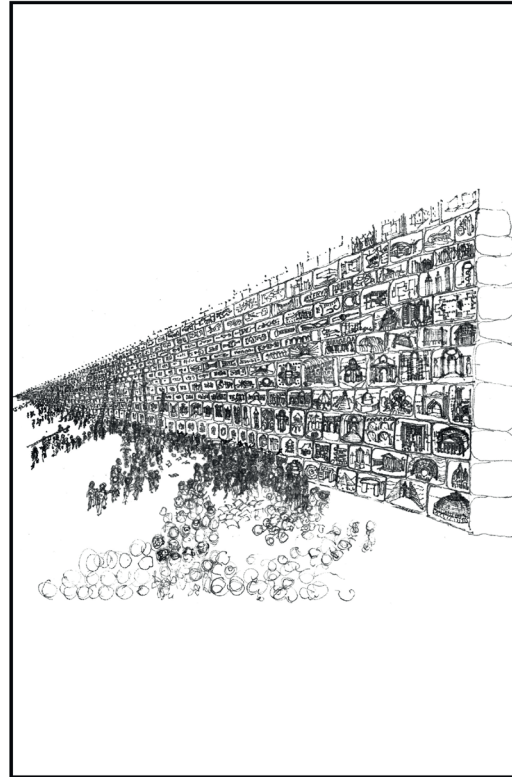


fig. 5 Weeping Wall / Shopping Mall (Drawing by Claudio Sgarbi, 2017)

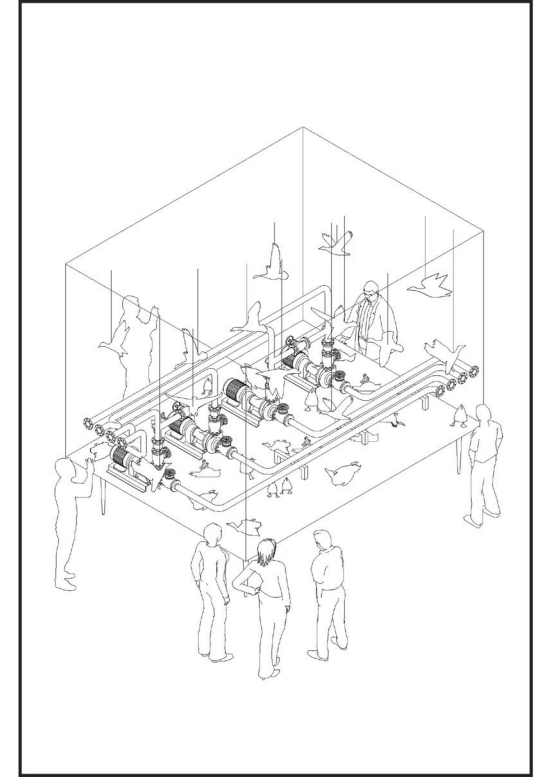


fig. 6 Necropolis: Memorial for the Ducks who Died for a Beautiful Destruction. (Drawing by Ali Navidbakhsh, 2016)

The idea that the voluntary sacrifice of a hero (like The Matrix's Neo – but, definitive, without sequels, please!) had saved the city from a destiny of complete erasure, raises many interesting issues. Maybe the city wanted to die. Has the city been made eternal against its will? And is this eternity its “great beauty”? A hero has saved it from its inexorable liquefaction. Forever. Notwithstanding all the horrors that have taken place, all the wounds that have been inflicted to prove its vulnerability, the city will last ad *aeternum*. A benediction or a curse?

From the perspective of a possible “death with interruptions” is there a place where we can take the city to die?

*All capable words which once again bring tears
Unwanted gifts in this journey to no thing.*

Roger Connah

Our crocodile tears on counterfactuals like the quarries, extraction sites, oceanic and stratospheric garbage dumps, spoiled territories and paradoxical recycling systems are the masquerade. They are the panorama to dissuade us from the quest for piety, the necessity for mourning an impossible number of victims. In the immense vastness of this built space, the time left to mourn is not enough.

Careful where you sneeze, you could wipe-out the dinosaurs.

Jesse Rafeiro



fig. 7 Marcus Curtius Jumps in the Ditch with his Hobby Horse to save the city of Rome. (Drawing by Claudio Sgarbi, 2017)

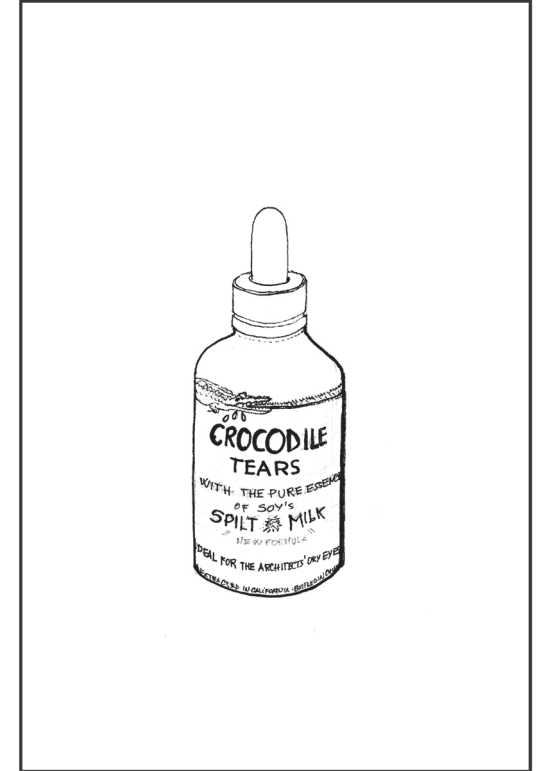


fig. 8 For the Architects' Dry Eyes: “Crocodile Tears with the Pure Essence of Soya Spilled Milk”. (Drawing by Claudio Sgarbi, 2017)



fig. 9 Atonement Triptych. Still Life. Grief. Forgotten. (Photographs by Fabio Elia Sgarbi, 2017)